

Jerusalem Letter

the Jerusalem center

JERUSALEM INSTITUTE FOR
FEDERAL STUDIES

CENTER FOR
JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDIES

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher • David Clayman, Executive Editor

ISSN: 0334-4096

No. 39: 3 Nisan 5741/ April 7, 1981

A PREVIEW OF THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS - 1981

David Clayman

On June 30, 1981, the Israeli electorate will go to the polls to elect Israel's tenth Knesset. Three months before election day the politicians and pollsters are in full swing but the public seems passive to the point of apathy.

The polls continue to show that the Labor Alignment will win a sizable victory but not one sufficient to give them an absolute majority as was predicted several months ago. Moreover, their strength is beginning to slip badly. In a recent poll during the month of March, the Alignment was seen as winning 45 seats and the Likud 33 seats. The Jerusalem Post poll published March 31 clearly indicates the decline in popularity of the Labor Alignment and the gains of the Likud.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Number of MKs</u>		
	<u>Mar.</u>	<u>Feb.</u>	<u>Jan.</u>
Likud	33	20	20
Alignment	45	45	58
NRP	9	10	11
Aguda bloc	5	6	5
Dayan	9	19	--
Shinui	2	1	2
Tehiya	3	3	4
Others	14	16	20

The usual rounds of highly visible actions by political leaders to attract popular support have begun. The new finance minister, Yoram Aridor, as part of his overall economic policy to lower prices, has lowered taxes on many durable goods, a good pre-election strategy whatever other benefits it may bring. As a result, over 100,000 color television sets and 10,000 cars have been purchased in recent weeks. Aridor's policies represent more than election bait. The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, and BBC Television have all carried favorable reports on his bold and imaginative initiatives. In political terms, however, the sorry record of the Likud government in the area of economics over the past three and one-half years may yet be forgotten by the voting public amidst this consumers' carnival.

The Jerusalem Letter is a periodic report intended to objectively clarify and analyze issues of Jewish and Israel public policy.
Subscriptions: \$25 per year

Copyright. All rights reserved.

Shimon Peres, the leader of the Alignment, recently returned from abroad where he reportedly met with King Hassan of Morocco, and the eccentric, Paris-based brother of Jordan's King Hussein. Press reports attribute this somewhat irregular initiative to pre-election efforts to project an image of a strong and dynamic peace initiative by Peres and his party. Whereas before Shimon Peres was negotiating with Arab leaders and the Egyptians were awaiting his accession to power to renew the autonomy talks because of his party's expected massive victory, now it is as much to build credibility and restore its declining fortunes.

The Labor Party within the Alignment has begun to negotiate the allocation of portfolios in the government they hope to form after the elections. The behind-the-scenes struggles and bickering between Labor Party factions and persons reflect the continuation of that internal divisiveness and self-destructiveness within the Labor Party which led to its defeat in 1977 and may yet erode their substantial lead this year.

The failure by Peres to recruit Yaacov Levinson to be his Finance Minister was a serious blow from the psychological and public relations points of view. Levinson, the past Chairman of Bank Hapoalim, was being touted as a financial genius who would restore stability to an economy wildly out of control. Reports indicated that Levinson set forth demands which Peres was unwilling to meet and hence he withdrew his candidacy. Levinson sought powers usually reserved to the Prime Minister. He demanded the right to approve all appointments to other economic posts in the government and Histadrut.

With Levinson out of the running, the Labor Party is without a strong, attractive candidate for this crucial cabinet post. Peres, in a relatively unsuccessful face-saving television interview, offered a troika of economic advisors, any one of whom would be a possible candidate for this appointment. The most likely candidate is Naftali Blumenthal, the head of Koor Industries. A second member of this troika, Gad Yaakobi, is regarded as a candidate for the post of Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Tourism. Yaakobi was Minister of Transportation in the previous Labor government and during the present Knesset serves as Chairman of the Knesset Economics Committee. Professor Haim Ben-Shahar, President of Tel Aviv University and architect of the major tax reform of several years ago, is the third member of the economic advisory committee.

Abba Eban is considered to be Labor's candidate for the Foreign Ministry and Haim Bar-Lev is the candidate for the Defense portfolio. The remaining posts must be allocated so as to ensure a "balanced ticket." The balanced ticket in Labor politics must be responsible to the demands of its internal, ideological groups known at the Beit Berl and Yahdav groups, the kibbutz movement, the Rabin camp, the Sephardic sector, the moshav movement, and women, as well as to the need to negotiate a coalition government with other parties since Labor no longer expects to win an absolute majority of seats in the Knesset.

Former police Minister, Shlomo Hillel (M.K.) a Sephardi, is likely to be the nominee for Knesset Speaker. If Labor forms the next government, the women's portfolio would probably be the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Possible candidates include Na'amat Secretary-General Nava Arad of the Beit Berl group, Ora Namir of the Rabin camp, or Shoshana Arbeli-Almoslino of Yahdav. The two competing candidates for the Justice Ministry seem to be Haim Zadok, who held this post in the previous Labor government, or Moshe Shahal. However, this post could well go to a potential coalition partner such as Amnon Rubenstein of the

Shinui Party. The Education Ministry seems to have been promised to Danny Rosolio of the Rabin camp. Yosef Tekoah, former Israel Ambassador to the U.N. and former president of Ben Gurion University, seems intent upon being nominated to the Absorption Ministry. Another Ambassador to the U. N., Chaim Herzog, is a likely candidate for the Ministry of Information, if one is established.

Peres' failure to recruit Levinson and his seeming inability to control internal factional struggles pales in the light of his fiery and fierce struggles with Yitzhak Rabin. Although Rabin lost in his bid to replace Peres as Party Chairman, he nevertheless retains considerable influence and support both within the party and among the electorate. Rabin's recent private meeting with Moshe Dayan was enough to create shock waves within the Labor Party and prompt Peres to consider ways and means to insure Rabin's support of the party in the forthcoming elections. The reported price for Rabin's support is the Defense Ministry as well as up to 30% of the Alignment list for his supporters.

All of the above defections, struggles, and conflicts of interest have seriously eroded the image of Peres as a strong and forceful leader in the eyes of the Israeli public, and have strengthened the sense of disillusionment with the Alignment. The idea that the Labor Party of David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir by birthright deserves to govern the State of Israel survives among party stalwarts only. The public's continuing disillusionment with Labor is matched only by their disappointment with the Likud. Begin's party waited 29 years to form a government and then proceeded in less than four years to lose that public support and confidence which allowed them to win the election in 1977 with 45 seats. This is compounded by the utter and complete failure of Yigael Yadin's Democratic Movement for Change to offer a viable third party option to Israeli voters. The DMC was formally disbanded at the end of February. The disenchantment with the Labor Alignment and the disappointment with the Likud explains the current election forecast of one pundit: "The Likud is not losing so fast and the Alignment is not winning so fast." In short, there is considerable doubt as to the results of this year's elections.

In the first seven Israeli elections from 1949 to 1979, the various Labor alignments gained anywhere from 56 to 65 mandates while the opposition Likud configuration garnered between 21 to 34 mandates. The first serious deviation from this traditional support for Labor came in 1973, after the Yom Kippur War when they won only 49 mandates and the Likud achieved an unprecedented 38 mandates. The subsequent disillusionment with the Rabin government and the appearance of Yadin's D.M.C. as an alternative broke Labor's monopoly on governance. In the 1977 elections, the Likud won 45 mandates, Labor sank to no more than 33, and the D.M.C. secured 15 mandates.

The current situation, reflected against this historical background, seems to indicate that the latest polls are only measuring the relative lack of enthusiasm for the Labor Alignment as opposed to the deep disappointment with the Likud. The present public frame of mind would best be described as one of apathy, if not alienation toward the 1981 elections. A recent poll by the Pori Institute indicates that approximately one third of the Israeli voting public is uninterested in the June elections and that it doesn't matter to them which party wins. One political commentator describes this year's elections as "thirty mandates in search of a party." The implication is that the disappearance of the D.M.C., the Likud's electoral regression, and the slippage by Labor has created a sizable floating vote which may stay home on election day or find a form of escapism in voting for an existing splinter party or new list. One result of this is greater

public support for the very small parties. For example, Shulamit Aloni teamed with former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benveniste may gain as many as four or five mandates according to recent polls when in the past she could get only one or two.

Dayan - Weizman - Rabin

All the above explains the drama of the candidacy of Moshe Dayan and the possible candidacy of Ezer Weizman. It is indeed the single dramatic dimension in this year's elections to date. Will Dayan's independent party list become the new balance wheel in the post-election game of coalition-building? Will Weizman join Dayan, rejoin the Likud, or sit on the sidelines? Why has Dayan been talking to Rabin and what are the possibilities of Rabin's bolting the Labor Party and forming a centrist front with Dayan and Weizman? An independent list headed by Dayan could draw anywhere from four to twenty-two mandates depending upon the poll consulted -- this despite strong antipathies toward him in many quarters, a general feeling that he has never been sufficiently punished for his role in the 1973 disaster.

An opinion poll conducted by the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research indicates that the prime consideration for many Israeli voters is neither the domestic economic issues nor international and foreign affairs, otherwise major considerations. Rather the critical determinant of voting behavior is the quality of the political candidates and their potential for leadership. Both Dayan and Weizman have a charismatic quality which is not the least part of this leadership dimension which the Israeli voter seeks. Although 43% of the sample in a recent poll opposed Dayan's running for political office, he drew the strongest response when the same voters were asked to rate ability to conduct Israel's foreign policy. In response to the opinion survey on leadership in foreign affairs, Dayan led with 18%, followed by Begin with 17%, Peres with 13%, Rabin with 11%, Eban with 9%, and Weizman with 5%. A similar poll last summer gave similar results except for Weizman who received 14% and Peres who only received 5%, both of which reflect the change since then in their election status.

What is most important about this poll is that there is no personality who has captured the imagination or fancy of the Israeli public. Dayan is the leading figure but enjoys the support of only 18% of the sample surveyed. As to his possible candidacy, 43% opposed his running for the Knesset. Only 17% endorsed his running on an independent list with another 26% endorsing his re-joining an existing party. The riddle of Dayan as an independent candidate may determine the results of the forthcoming elections. Unless the two major parties succeed in appealing to the disappointed and disillusioned Israeli voter, Dayan could will succeed in fragmenting the tenth Knesset beyond that which has been traditional in Israeli politics. Dayan's candidacy, as well as the possibility of Weizman and Rabin as independent candidates, can best be described as the wild cards in an otherwise listless political game this year.